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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses problems in research on urban education and outlines several National Institute of Education (NIE) proposals for dealing with these problems. It is argued that research should not stray too far from the basic educational goals of inculcating literacy, that educational research must become more diverse and sophisticated in its methodologies, and that the topics for study should be realistic. Other problem areas discussed include the "teacher drop-out" syndrome, the diversity of present day classrooms, special education needs, and external demands such as accountability movements and legislative requirements. Four projects which relate to urban settings and reflect the philosophy of action-oriented research are described. These include Jesse Jackson's Project EXCEL, the Cities in School Project, the Career Intern Program, and the role of community colleges in improving adult literacy. (Author/EB)

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I AM DELIGHTED TO BE HERE THIS AFTERNOON. AS YOU KNOW, URBAN EDUCATION IS ONE OF FOUR AREAS, ALONG WITH TEACHING, SECONDARY SCHOOLS, AND INCREASING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WHICH WE HAVE IDENTIFIED AT NIE AS TOPICS FOR SPECIAL ATTENTION IN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS. OUR CHOICE OF URBAN EDUCATION WAS MADE FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS.

FIRST, BECAUSE OF THEIR SIZE AND VISIBILITY, URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN SHAPING NATIONAL PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION. THIRTY YEARS AGO URBAN SCHOOLS WERE AMONGST THE FINEST IN THE NATION, WHILE TODAY THEIR STUDENTS OFTEN OCCUPY THE LOWEST RUNGS ON THE LADDER OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT.

SECOND, BIG CITY SCHOOLS COMPRISE A KEY TEST OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S MISSION TO INCREASE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TO HELP MOVE AMERICA TOWARDS EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY. AT NIE, WE HAVE DEFINED EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AS ATTEMPTING TO REDUCE THE PREDICTIVE VALUE OF RACE, SEX, AND SOCIAL CLASS IN DETERMINING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT. URBAN ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS IN SOME LOCATIONS ARE SUCCEEDING AT THIS TASK, AND WE HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM THEIR EXAMPLE. FINALLY, A KEY GOAL OF NIE IS TO UTILIZE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE. URBAN SCHOOLS FACE MANY TOUGH PROBLEMS - INADEQUATE RESOURCES, TRUANCY AND ABSENTEEISM, VIOLENCE AND VANDALISM, AND COMMUNITY IN-DIFFERENCE OR HOSTILITY. AFTER THE BRIEF FLURRY OF FEDERAL

PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH IN URBAN EDUCATION IN THE 1960s, IT HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE TO CONCLUDE THAT THE MOST HELPFUL ROLE FOR RESEARCHERS IS TO STAY OUT OF URBAN SCHOOLS. HOWEVER, I AM CONSIDERABLY MORE HOPEFUL.

IN THE REMAINDER OF MY REMARKS, I WILL TRACE THE SOURCES OF MY OPTIMISM. FIRST, I WILL PRESENT MY ANALYSIS OF HOW SEVERAL FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH HAVE LIMITED ITS CONTRIBUTION TO URBAN EDUCATORS. SECOND, I WILL DISCUSS HOW NIE PLANS TO FORMULATE AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH ON URBAN EDUCATION IN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS.

OVER THE PAST MONTHS, I HAVE BEEN FORMULATING AND PRESENTING MY THOUGHTS ON THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH. MY ANALYSIS FOCUSES ON THREE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES WHICH HAVE CLEAR IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN URBAN EDUCATION. FIRST, I HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING THE NOTION THAT THE FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE OF EDUCATION OUGHT TO BE TO INCULCATE LITERACY, WHICH I DEFINE BROADLY AS HELPING ALL OUR CITIZENS TO LEARN TO READ AND WRITE, TO MANIPULATE SYMBOLS, TO THINK CRITICALLY, TO MAKE INDEPENDENT JUDGMENTS AND TO DETERMINE INDEPENDENT ACTIONS. MY ARGUMENT STANDS IN AN HISTORIC CONTEXT THAT HAS SEEN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM CALLED UPON TO BRING ABOUT A VARIETY OF SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND EVEN THEOLOGICAL OUTCOMES, ONLY TO BE SEVERELY CHASTISED BY THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WHEN THESE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS WERE NOT PRODUCED. URBAN SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO THIS PROBLEM;

THEIR LEGACY OF SOCIALIZING IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS, AN ABSENCE OF OTHER SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS, AND THE CONVENIENCE OF NEIGHBORHOOD-CENTERED FACILITIES TO MANY SERVICE NEEDS HAVE ALL LED US TO EXPECT MUCH MORE THAN MERE SCHOOLING FROM OUR URBAN SCHOOLS.

MY ASSERTION IS THAT UNTIL WE ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT THE NOTION THAT THE PRINCIPAL BUSINESS OF SCHOOLS IS TO MAKE PEOPLE LITERATE IN A BROAD SENSE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO CHARGE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WITH UNDERSTAKINGS IN WHICH IT IS DOOMED TO FAILURE. HISTORICALLY, THIS HAS MEANT THAT MUCH OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN DOCUMENTING THE FAILURE OF THE SYSTEM. I AM NOT OPPOSED TO HOLDING SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE, BUT I DO THINK THE PURPOSES OF OUR RESEARCH SHOULD NOT STRAY TOO FAR FROM BASIC EDUCATIONAL GOALS.

MY SECOND POINT IS THAT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH MUST BECOME MORE DIVERSE AND SOPHISTICATED IN ITS METHODOLOGIES. IN THE PAST, I FEEL WE HAVE OVER-RELIED ON HIGHLY QUANTITATIVE METHODS BORROWED FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES. IN PART BECAUSE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IS A RELATIVELY LOW-STATUS NEWCOMER TO THE SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY, WE HAVE STRESSED METHODOLOGICAL PURITY AND CONFORMITY RATHER THAN DEVELOPING A VARIETY OF RESEARCH STRATEGIES. THE IMPACT OF THESE METHODS ON URBAN EDUCATION HAS OFTEN BEEN TO OVERGENERALIZE, TO DEVELOP UNFAVORABLE STEREOTYPES OF THE "TYPICAL" URBAN CLASSROOM, AND TO MASK CRUCIAL VARIATIONS IN CIRCUMSTANCES, TECHNIQUES, AND OUTCOMES. ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS FROM ANTHROPOLOGY, RE-

SEARCH WITHIN THE CLASSROOM SETTING, AND CASE STUDIES OF THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING REFORMS OR PROGRAMS ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF METHODS WHICH DEVIATE FROM MORE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES. EACH MAKES GREAT DEMANDS ON "ELEGANCE" OF ANALYSIS, ON THE INTUITION OF THE INVESTIGATOR, AND ON CONTINUING INTERACTION WITH EDUCATIONAL PRACTITIONERS.

THE THIRD AREA NEEDING REFORMULATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IS THE SELECTION OF TOPICS FOR STUDY. ALL TOO OFTEN RESEARCH HAS BEEN GUIDED BY A DESIRE TO EVALUTE UNREALISTIC SOCIAL GOALS FOR EDUCATION, OR DICTATED BY METHODOLOGICAL FASHION. IN ADDITION, PRACTICING EDUCATORS HAVE GENERALLY BEEN EXCLUDED FROM THE PROCESS OF FORMULATING RESEARCH AGENDAS AND DESIGNS. AS A RESULT, THE STUDY OF EDUCATION HAS TAKEN ON UNSPOKEN PARAMETERS, EXCLUDING PROBLEMS WHICH DO NOT LEND THEMSELVES TO TREATMENT BY TRADITIONAL METHODS.

THE REALLY "HARD" QUESTIONS INVOLVED IN URBAN EDUCATION OFTEN DO NOT LEND THEMSELVES TO THE "HARD" DISCIPLINES. RESEARCHERS HAVE IN MANY CASES PREFERRED THE DOABLE TO THE SIGNIFICANT TOPIC. THEY HAVE ESCHEWED TOPICS INVOLVING COMPLICATED HUMAN ISSUES, PREFERRING TO UNDERTAKE LESS EMOTIONALLY FREIGHTED ONES. BUT THE PROBLEMS OF URBAN EDUCATION ARE HUMAN PROBLEMS, NOT LABORATORY ONES, AND IF WE ARE TO IMPROVE EDUCATION THROUGH RESEARCH, THEN WE MUST WORK ON SUBJECTS THAT DEAL WITH THE ESSENCE OF THESE COMPLICATED DILEMMAS.

GIVEN MY PERSPECTIVE, IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT THE PLAN OF THIS CONFERENCE MEETS WITH MY WHOLEHEARTED APPROVAL. THE MIX OF POLICY-MAKERS, DEVELOPERS, RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS STRIKES ME AS PRECISELY THE RIGHT COMPOSITION OF PARTICIPANTS TO BEGIN A DIALOGUE TO IMPROVE OUR GOALS, METHODS, AND THE TOPICS WE SELECT FOR STUDY.

ONE EXAMPLE OF THE TYPE OF ISSUE WHICH IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEPTUALIZE AND MEASURE PRECISELY IS THE ROLE OF THE EXPERIENCED TEACHER IN URBAN CLASSROOMS. SURVEYS AND ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE HAVE CONVERGED TO POINT UP SEVERAL KEY FACTS IN RECENT YEARS:

- DECLINING ENROLLMENTS AND REDUCED RATES OF NEW HIRING HAVE PRODUCED A WORK FORCE OF OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED TEACHERS AT ALL LEVELS.
- DUE TO A VARIETY OF INFLUENCES, THE BASIC JOB OF CLASSROOM TEACHING IS BECOMING MORE DIFFICULT. CLASSROOMS ARE BECOMING MORE DIVERSE IN THE COMPOSITION OF STUDENTS BY RACE, ETHNICITY, SOCIAL CLASS AND VARIOUS TYPES OF SPECIAL EDCUCATIONAL NEEDS. IN ADDITION, TEACHERS ARE FACING A BEWILDERING COMBINATION OF EXTERNAL DEMANDS, RANGING FROM ACCOUNTABILITY TESTING MOVEMENTS, THE REQUIREMENTS OF 94-142, AND VIOLENCE AND TRUANCY.
- A GROWING PROBLEM IS THE LOSS OF NUMBERS OF THE BEST EXPERIENCED TEACHERS FROM OUR URBAN SYSTEMS, OR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL WITHDRAWAL OF THOSE WHO STAY ON THE JOB.

EACH OF THESE TRENDS LEADS TO A VARIETY OF INTRIGUING ISSUES FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE. THE MATURATION IN AGE OF THE TEACHER WORK FORCE REQUIRES NEW STRATEGIES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, WITH A PRIORITY ON IN-SCHOOL, IN-SERVICE

SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE AS OPPOSED TO EMPHASIZING THE PREPARATION OF CADRES OF NEW RECRUITS EACH YEAR WITHIN THE COLLEGE SETTING. THE COMPLEXITY OF NEW DEMANDS ON THE CLASSROOM TEACHER LEADS US TO ASK WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES OF "SUCCESSFUL" TEACHERS IN THESE CONDITIONS, AND WHAT FORMS OF SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE ARE EFFECTIVE AND PLAUSIBLE.

THE "TEACHER DROP-OUT" SYNDROME RAISES A PARTICULARLY PRICKLY SET OF ISSUES. TO BEGIN WITH WE NEED TO KNOW MUCH MORE, NOT SIMPLY ABOUT THE EXTENT OF THIS PHENOMENA, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY WHY IT IS HAPPENING AND WHAT IT MEANS. ARE TEACHERS BEING PUSHED OUT IN FRUSTRATION OR PULLED OUT BY BETTER JOB OPPORTUNITIES? IS THE SQUEEZE OF RESOURCES REDUCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTIONS WITHIN SCHOOL SYSTEMS AND REDUCING INCENTIVES FOR INVESTING YEARS AT THE CLASSROOM LEVEL? WHAT TYPES OF PRINCIPALS, SUPERINTENDENTS, PARENT GROUPS, OR STUDENT BODIES TEND TO HOLD ON TO TOP TEACHERS? WHAT SUPPORT SYSTEMS, TRANSFER OR SABBATICAL SCHEMES, OR JOB ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS ARE IN PLACE IN VARIOUS URBAN DISTRICTS AND WHAT IS THEIR IMPACT?

EVEN THE LISTING OF THESE ISSUES MAKES IT CLEAR THAT RESEARCH PLANS IN THIS AREA WILL REQUIRE EXTENSIVE CONSULTATION WITH UNION OFFICIALS, SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS THEMSELVES. IN ADDITION, THE VARIABLES AND OUTCOMES INVOLVED WILL REQUIRE STRETCHING, COMBINING, OR DISCARDING TRADITIONAL METHODS OF INQUIRY. HOWEVER, I HOPE YOU WILL AGREE THAT THE URGENCY OF THESE ISSUES DEMANDS THAT WE BEGIN TO TRY.

In the remainder of my remarks, I would like to outline some of our current activities and future plans in the area of urban education. In doing so I must be careful to strike a balance between being informative and creating the impression of closed-mindedness. Certainly CEMREL and NIE seek your input on the current state of knowledge, and the key priority issues for future research. Our future plans at NIE are tentative, subject to your input, as well as being dependent on the vicissitudes of the Federal budget process.

Also I believe it is extremely arbitrary to label as "urban" or "not urban" many of our activities, since many which are not specifically urban, have absolutely critical relevance to urban schools. For example, our survey of violence and vandalism, our work in school finance reform, and our program of research in basic skills acquisition are all national in scope, but clearly important to urban practitioners.

However, in the next year we will be carrying out four projects which relate specifically to urban settings and reflect the philosophy of practice-oriented research. Each project is an evaluation of a locally developed program focusing on the problems of urban youth. The evaluations are NOT designed primarily to gather national-level quantitative data on program success or failure. Rather the audience for these studies is the local program implementor, who wants to know specifics about the conditions and strategies necessary for success.

THE FIRST OF THESE PROGRAMS IS PROJECT EXCEL, DEVELOPED BY REV. JESSE JACKSON TO STIMULATE INNER CITY STUDENTS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR EDUCATION AND "EXCEL" IN SCHOOL. THE PROGRAM ENDEAVORS TO MOBILIZE PARENTS, CLERGY, MEDIA, AND LOCAL BUSINESS TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND MOTIVATE STUDENTS. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES INCLUDE REDUCING ABSENTEEISM, VIOLENCE, TEENAGE PREGNANCY, AND DRUG USAGE.

THE SECOND INNOVATION IS THE CITIES IN SCHOOL PROJECT WHICH FOCUSES ON BRINGING SOCIAL SERVICES AND SUPPORT STAFF INTO THE SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND THE CLASSROOM TEACHER. REMEDIAL TEACHERS, COUNSELORS, HEALTH SPECIALISTS, AND RECREATIONAL STAFF WORK IN TEAMS WITH GROUPS OF FORTY STUDENTS.

BOTH OF THESE PROJECTS SEEK TO SUPPORT THE CLASSROOM TEACHER BY DEALING WITH THE STUDENTS' NON-ACADEMIC NEEDS. EXCEL MOBILIZES COMMUNITY AND PARENTAL RESOURCES, WHILE CITIES IN SCHOOLS INTEGRATES SUPPORT SERVICES WITH STAFF IN THE SCHOOLS. THUS THESE PROGRAMS ASSUME THAT IF CONFLICTING, DISTRACTING SOCIAL AND MOTIVATIONAL PROBLEMS CAN BE REDUCED, THE CLASSROOM TEACHER CAN ATTACK LITERACY PROBLEMS SUCCESSFULLY.

THE OTHER TWO PROGRAMS ALSO FOCUS ON STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT SUCCEEDED WITHIN THE REGULAR SCHOOL STRUCTURE. NIE IS SUPPORTING A REPLICATION AND EVALUATION OF THE CAREER INTERN PROGRAM DEVELOPED BY THE OPPORTUNITIES INDUSTRIALIZATION CORPORATIONS OF AMERICA IN PHILADELPHIA, DIRECTED BY REV. LEON SULLIVAN. C.I.P. IS AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

FOR YOUTHS WHO HAVE DROPPED OUT OR ARE AT SERIOUS RISK OF NOT GRADUATING. THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM ARE TO ENABLE THESE STUDENTS TO IMPROVE BASIC READING AND MATHEMATICS SKILLS, PLAN FOR A CAREER, AND COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL.

THE FINAL PROJECT IS A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY. IT WILL FOCUS ON THE COLLEGES AS AN EFFECTIVE DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR MINORITY POPULATIONS IN SUCH AREAS AS BASIC SKILLS, VOCATIONAL-OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS, AND COUNSELING.

EACH OF THESE PROGRAMS HAS A DIFFERENT DIAGNOSIS AND REMEDY FOR URBAN EDUCATION. THIS DIVERSITY REFLECTS THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM A VARIETY OF "TOP-DOWN" FEDERAL REFORM EFFORTS OF THE 60S. THE BEST STUDIES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE SCHEMES CONCLUDED THAT THE KEY TO SUCCESS WAS LOCAL INVOLVEMENT AND OWNERSHIP OF THE INNOVATION, RATHER THAN THE PARTICULAR PROGRAM DESIGN.

THESE FOUR PROJECTS WERE ALL DEVELOPED IN LOCAL URBAN COMMUNITIES. EACH WILL FACE THE PROBLEMS OF ADAPTING TO NEW SITES AS REPLICATION PROCEEDS, BUT THE VARIETY OF THEIR APPROACHES IS A STRENGTH RATHER THAN A WEAKNESS. IT ALLOWS A BROADER EXPLORATION OF THE FORM AND PROCESS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS WHEN MATCHED WITH DIFFERENT LOCAL SCHOOLS.

OUR EVALUATION DESIGNS FOR THESE PROGRAMS PLACE A SMILIAR EMPHASIS ON THE BENEFITS OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION. THE

EVALUATION PLANS FOR EXCEL AND CITIES IN SCHOOLS ARE BEING DEVELOPED WITH LOCAL TEAMS OF "STAKEHOLDERS," - PARENTS, STAFF, STUDENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS IN EACH LOCAL SITE. THE EVALUATION CONTRACTOR WILL CONSULT WITH THESE GROUPS IN DESIGNING THE QUESTIONS, TIMING, AND FORMAT FOR REPORTS TO INSURE THAT THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS WILL SUPPORT THE PROGRESS OF EACH LOCAL SITE.

THE IMPORTANT POINT IS THAT WE MUST LOOK AT A VARIETY OF APPROACHES TO PROBLEMS IN URBAN EDUCATION. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT PROGRAMS CENTERED IN THE SCHOOLS AND THOSE WITH A MORE COMMUNITY BASED CONTEXT MUST BE INVESTIGATED, AND ABOVE ALL WE MUST NOT BE DISCOURAGED BY EITHER PAST FAILURE NOR THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROBLEMS WE FACE.